

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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Negotiating Difference: Educational Experiences of Deaf and Hard-of- hearing Students in Mainstream Japanese Schools

Jennifer M. McGuire, Doshisha University

Japan is part of a global trend in which enrollment in schools for the deaf is in decline due to a pedagogical shift: first towards 'integration' and later towards 'inclusion'. As a result, it is rapidly becoming the norm for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Japan to be educated alongside hearing peers rather than among deaf and hard-of-hearing ones. Comparative research suggests that these mainstreamed students face social neglect and isolation. Yet, as studies have shown, Japanese youth are not passive actors. They can work to actively interpret and transform their situation.

This presentation focuses on the results of a 15-month ethnographic study on young (18 to 24 year-old) Japanese self-identified '*inte*' (a shortened version of the loanword for integration) who were educated in 'hearing schools'. By using a range of qualitative research methods including 'peer interviews', participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, and social media analysis, it interrogated the short and long-term effects of 'mainstreaming' on selfhood, communication methods, and *ibasho*. Through an actor-centered approach that prioritizes the perspectives of *inte* over those of the gatekeepers, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which marginalized young people exercise agency to (re)negotiate difference in mainstream environments. The findings reveal that *inte* are educated in environments where there are physiological and social barriers to belonging. At the same time, they employ tactics and strategies to improve their circumstances, such as concealing markers of difference, rejecting information support, performing 'communication competence', and mimicry. The outcome of these performative methods is rarely social belonging but rather an in-between, 'grey zone' status.

Jennifer M. McGuire is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Sociology in the Faculty of Social Studies at Doshisha University. She received a DPhil (PhD) in Anthropology from the University of Oxford. Her main research interest concerns the intersections of language, identity, and belonging for minority youth, particularly those who are deaf/hard-of-hearing or 'disabled'. Her current project analyzes representations of deafness and disability in media and film.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at www.dijtokyo.org.

Venue:

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094
Phone: 03-3222-5077

For directions visit dijtokyo.org/access

